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19. **ENDANGERED SPECIES: NASA joins search for Ark. ivory-billed woodpecker**

NASA scientists will use a laser-equipped research aircraft to fly over the woods of Arkansas in search of the ivory-billed woodpecker, an elusive bird once thought extinct, the space agency announced yesterday.

Scientists from NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center and the University of Maryland will use the aircraft to send pulses of energy over the Big Woods area of the Mississippi Delta. Light particles from the laser bounce off the surface of the forest and back to the instrument, mapping a detailed model of the woodpecker's natural environment.

"We're trying to understand the environment where these birds live or used to live," said NASA scientist Woody Turner (Reuters/[Houston Chronicle](#), Aug. 3).

Despite two years of concentrated effort, scientists searching for the ivory-billed woodpecker in eastern Arkansas have not been able to replicate firm evidence of the bird's existence.

The ivory-billed woodpecker -- a large, long-necked bird with distinctive white markings on its wings -- is considered one of the "holy grails" of both birders and endangered species advocates. The bird was believed extinct for decades before a single male was spotted in February 2004 by a naturalist in the Bayou de View region of the Cache River refuge. Drawing upon evidence from subsequent searches, sightings and a grainy video recording of the bird, experts from the Cornell lab confirmed the ivory-billed's existence last year in the journal *Science* ([Greenwire](#), June 22). -- **EB**

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